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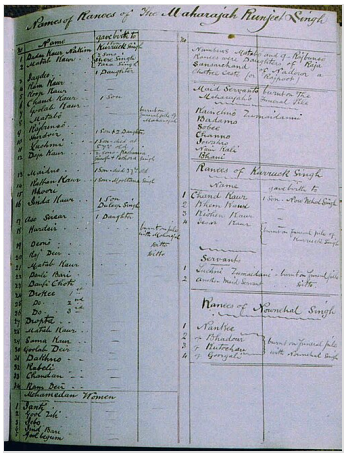
Wives of Ranjit Singh

Maharaja Ranjit Singh had many wives, possibly around thirty.[1] Furthermore, he kept a company of around twenty-three concubines and a 150 dancing-girls, mostly from Kashmir and the Punjab Hills.[2][3] The numerous wives were of various ethnic backgrounds, such as Punjabi, Pashtun, and Pahari, and also various caste-backgrounds, such as Jatt, Rajput, and Gujjar. The marriages initially helped strengthen the Sukerchakia Misl and later the Sikh Empire, due to marital-alliances to various groups.[1][4] After Ranjit Singh provided help to Sansar Chand of Kangra against the invading Gurkhas, he married two of the Kangra ruler's daughters.[2] At-least five of his wives were Muslim.[5]

Of his marriages, at-least ten of these marriages were by the traditional ceremony and included five Sikhs, three Hindus, and two Muslim ladies.[2][3] At-least a further ten of his marriages had taken place by the *chaddar* ceremony, which included seven Sikh and three Hindu ladies.[2][3] At the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's death, four of his wives (two Rajputs) and seven of his slave-girls (concubines) committed sati on his funerary-pyre.[6][7]



Genealogical notes on Sikh emperors from the Lahore Durbar, focusing on their wives and children, from the personal notebook and copybook of Duleep Singh, ca.1855–60. The many wives of Ranjit Singh and their children are enumerated.

Contents

History
Titles
List
References

History

In 1789, Ranjit Singh married his first wife Mehtab Kaur,[8] the muklawa happened in 1796.[9] She was the only daughter of Gurbaksh Singh Kanhaiya and his wife Sada Kaur. She was the granddaughter of Jai Singh Kanhaiya, the founder of the Kanhaiya Misl.[10] This marriage was pre-arranged in an attempt to reconcile warring Sikh *misls*, Mehtab Kaur was betrothed to Ranjit Singh in 1786. The marriage, however, failed, with Mehtab Kaur never forgiving the fact that her father had been killed in battle with Ranjit Singh's father, and she mainly resided with her mother after marriage. The separation became complete when Ranjit Singh married Datar Kaur of the Nakai Misl in 1797 and she turned into Ranjit's most beloved wife.[11] Mehtab Kaur had three sons, Ishar Singh who was born in 1804 and died in infancy. In 1807 she had Sher Singh and Tara Singh. According to historian Jean-Marie Lafont, she was the only one to bear the title of Maharani. She died in 1813, after suffering from failing health.[12]

Four Rajput wives of Ranjit Singh perform sati, detail from a painting of the funeral of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, ca.1840

His second marriage was to, Datar Kaur (Born *Raj Kaur*) the youngest child and only daughter of Ran Singh Nakai, the third ruler of the Nakai Misl and his wife Karman Kaur. They were betrothed in childhood by Datar Kaur's eldest brother, *Sardar Bhagwan Singh,* who briefly became the chief of the Nakai Misl, and Ranjit Singh's father Maha Singh. They were married in 1797;[13] this marriage was a happy one and Ranjit Singh always treated Raj Kaur with love and respect.[14] Since Raj Kaur was also the name of Ranjit Singh's mother, his wife was renamed Datar Kaur. In 1801, she gave birth to their son and heir apparent, Kharak Singh.[15] Datar Kaur bore Ranjit Singh two other sons, Rattan Singh and Fateh Singh.[16][17][18] Like his first marriage, the second marriage also brought him a strategic military alliance.[15] Along with wisdom and all the chaste virtues of a noblewoman, Datar Kaur was exceptionally intelligent and assisted Ranjit Singh in affairs of the State.[19] During the expedition to Multan in 1818, she was given command alongside her son, Kharak Singh.[20][21][22]

It is widely recognized that Datar Kaur had a great amount of influence on Ranjit Singh. [23]Throughout his life she remained Ranjit Singh's favorite wife and for no one did he have greater respect than Datar Kaur, who he affectionately called *Mai Nakain*.[24][25][26][27][28]

Even though she was his second wife she became his principal wife and chief consort.[29][30] During a hunting trip with Ranjit Singh, she fell ill and died on 20 June 1838.[31][32] On her death *The Missionary* reported,[33]

> "The Maharajah was never the same person again. He was no longer able to mount his horse himself and had to be lifted into the saddle. His recovery was retarded by the death of Mai Nakain, his favourite wife and companion of over forty years . He took the Nakain's death to heart and brooded over it a long time"

Ratan Kaur and Daya Kaur were wives of Sahib Singh Bhangi of Gujrat (a *misl* north of Lahore, not to be confused with the state of Gujarat).[34] After Sahib Singh's death, Ranjit Singh took them under his protection in 1811 by marrying them via the rite of *chādar andāzī*, in which a cloth sheet was unfurled over each of their heads. The same with Roop Kaur, Gulab Kaur, Saman Kaur, and Lakshmi Kaur who looked after Duleep Singh when his mother Jind Kaur was exiled. Ratan Kaur had a son Multana Singh in 1819, and Daya Kaur had two sons Kashmira Singh and Pashaura Singh in 1821.[35][36]

Jind Kaur, the final spouse of Ranjit Singh. Her father, Manna Singh Aulakh, extolled her virtues to Ranjit Singh, who was concerned about the frail

health of his only heir Kharak Singh. The Maharaja married her in 1835 by 'sending his arrow and sword to her village'. On 6 September 1838 she gave birth to Duleep Singh, who became the last Maharaja of the Sikh Empire.[37]

Maharaja Ranjit Singh with some of his wives.

In the 1830s toward the end of Ranjit Singh's life, his number of marriages increased substantially as many new women were wedded to him.[38] His other wives included, Mehtab Devi of Kangra, also called Guddan or Katochan, and Raj Banso, daughters of Raja Sansar Chand of Kangra.[39] He was also married to Rani Har Devi of Atalgarh, Rani Aso Sircar, and Rani Jag Deo. According to the diaries, that Duleep Singh kept towards the end of his life, these women presented the Maharaja with four daughters. Dr. Priya Atwal notes that the daughters could be adopted.[8] Ranjit Singh was also married to Jind Bani or Jind Kulan, daughter of Muhammad Pathan from Mankera, presented to him in 1824, and Gul Bano, daughter of Malik Akhtar from Amritsar. Another Pashtun woman, named Zebo, was also married to him, who was originally sent as a concubine from Kashmir in 1832 after being given by her father.[39] The marriages to Pashtun women happened as the Sikh Empire conquered Kashmir and former Afghan territory on its western-border.[39]

Ranjit Singh married many times, in various ceremonies, and had twenty wives.[40][41] Sir Lepel Griffin, however, provides a list of just sixteen wives and their pension list. Most of his marriages were performed through chādar andāz.[42] Some scholars note that the information on Ranjit Singh's marriages is unclear, and there is evidence that he had many concubines. Dr. Priya Atwal presents an official list of Ranjit Singh's thirty wives.[21] The women married through chādar andāzī were noted as concubines and were known as the lesser title of Rani (queen).[22] While Mehtab Kaur and Datar Kaur officially bore the title of Maharani (high queen), Datar Kaur officially became the Maharani after the death of Mehtab Kaur in 1813. Throughout her life was referred to as Sarkar Rani.[43] After her death, the title was held by Ranjit's youngest widow Jind Kaur.[44] According to Khushwant Singh in an 1889 interview with the French journal *Le Voltaire*, his son Dalip (Duleep) Singh remarked, "I am the son of one of my father's forty-six wives."[12] Dr. Priya Atwal notes that Ranjit Singh and his heirs entered a total of 46 marriages.[45] But Ranjit Singh was known not to be a "rash sensualist" and commanded unusual respect in the eyes of others.[46] Faqir Sayyid Vaḥiduddin states: "If there was one thing in which Ranjit Singh failed to excel or even equal the average monarch of oriental history, it was the size of his harem."[47][46] George Keene noted, "In hundreds and in thousands the orderly crowds stream on. Not a bough is broken off a wayside tree, not a rude remark to a woman".[46]

Titles

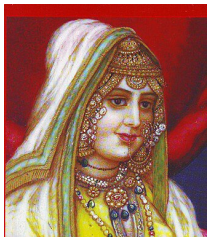
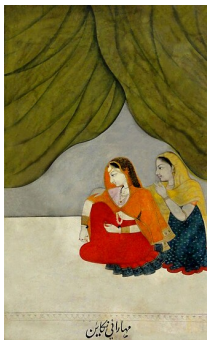
There were various *khitab* (titles) given to the women depending on their status.[38] In the period of the Sikh Misls, high-status women, such as Sada Kaur and Raj Kaur, were given the title *sardarni* and the more-general term *musammat*.[38] However, by the time of the 1830s when many new women were wed to Ranjit Singh, the wives were given the more prestigious title of *sarkarat*, a plural term referring to the multiple women who took-on the *sarkar* title after their marriage to Ranjit Singh.[38] As per the writings of the court-historians, there were different terms used to differentiate between royal-women, such as wives, versus concubines and other women of the court (servants, dancers, courtesans, slaves, etc.), with royal-women being known through the titles of *maharani*, *rani sahiba*, *sarkar*, and were described as *purdahnashin*, for their practice of purdah.[38] However, there were cases where non-royal women, such as dancing-girls, managed to elevate themselves to the position of being wives, such as the case of Gul Begum.[38] Maharaja Ranjit Singh would go-on to bestow Gul Begum with the *maharani* title.[38] The wives' families would often benefit from these marriages, with their brothers and other members of their family often being gifted *jagirs* and prestigious titles/positions.[39] Most significant and powerful of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's wives was Maharani Datar Kaur who he affectionately called Mai Nakain.[49] Though he went on to marry many women Mai Nakain remained his favorite and most respected wife.[50]

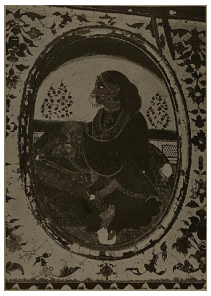
Lithograph titled 'Dancing Girls', from 'The Court and Camp of Runjeet Sing' by William Godolphin Osborne, depicting dancing-girls at the camp of Ranjit Singh, published in 1840[48]

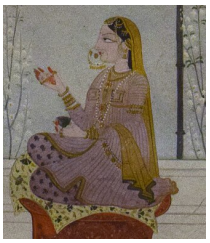
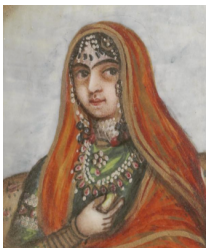
List

A list prepared by Priya Atwal of the known wives of Ranjit Singh, using contemporary documents and other sources, is as follows:[51]

List of wives of Maharaja Ranjit Singh[51]

No.	Name(s)	Portrait	Religion	Background	Marriage date	Death date	Pension value	Property	Dependents, issues, or heirs
1.	Mehtab Kaur (1)		Sikh	Daughter of the Kanhaiya Misl	1789	1813		Jagir of Batala	Maharaja Sher Singh and Kunwar Tara Singh
2.	Mai Nakain (Datar Kaur)		Sikh	Daughter of Nakai Misl	1797	1838		Jagir of Sheikhupura	Maharaja Kharak Singh
3.	Moran (Mai Mohran)		Muslim	Dancing-girl from Amritsar	1802	1814[52]	Unknown	Multiple residences, gardens, and public-buildings in Lahore	
4.	Rattan Kaur		Sikh	Widow of Sahib Singh Bhangi	1811	?	Rs. 1,000		Kunwar Multana Singh
5.	Daya Kaur		Sikh	Widow of Sahib Singh Bhangi (Rattan Kaur's sister)	1811	?	Unknown		Kunwars Kashmira Singh and Pashaura Singh
6.	Unknown name			Zamindar's daughter from Vainiki	1812	?	Unknown		
7.	Roop Kaur		Sikh	Daughter of Jai Singh of Kot Said Mehmood	1815	?	Rs. 1,980		Adopted her nephew's son
8.	Jumrul Beebee			Daughter of a shawl weaver, given to Ranjit Singh by the governor of Kashmir	1816	?	Rs. 1,800		
9.	Luchmee Kaur Vudpuggun		Sikh	Adopted daughter of a *sardar* of Kartarpur	1820	?	Rs. 11,200		Took-care of Duleep Singh when Jind Kaur was exiled. Adoped a girl named Ram Kaur.
10.	Jind Kulan (Jind Bani)			Daughter of a Pathan/ Pashtun of Mankera[38]	1824	?	Rs. 1,800		

11.	Jind Kaur		Sikh	Daughter of Manna Singh Aulakh, a kennel-keeper at Lahore	1825?	1863	Rs. 30,000	Duleepgarh, jewellery	Maharajah Duleep Singh
12.	Doulee Khoond		Hindu	Daughter of Jammuite Rajputs	1826	?	Rs. 1,563		
13.	Chund Kaur		Sikh	Daughter of Jatt *zamindars* of Duska, Sialkot	1827	?	Initially Rs. 2,520, later reduced to Rs. 1,260 after she eloped in 1852	Residence in Sialkot	
14.	Dukhno		Hindu	Daughter of a Rajput family from Kangra	1827	?	Rs. 1,908	Residence in Kangra	
15.	Katochan (Mehtab Devi/ Guddan)		Hindu	Daughter of Raja Sansar Chand of Kangra	1829	1839 (death by sati)[7]			
16.	Raj Banso		Hindu	Daughter of Raja Sansar Chand of Kangra	1829	1830s, possibly 1835[6] (death by suicide through overdosing on opium after Ranjit Singh compared her beauty to that of a dancing-girl[53])			
17.	Medno			Daughter of a Suleria zamindar named Oochul Singh from Gurdaspur	1829	?	Rs. 7,291		
18.	Mehtab Kaur (2)		Sikh	Daughter of Soojana Singh, a Jatt zamindar from Sialkot	1829	?	Rs. 1,930		
19.	Zebo			Presented to Ranjit Singh by the governor of Kashmir. From a Pathan/ Pashtun-background.[38]	1830	1855?	Rs. 1,620		Possibly a son of a Kashmiri pundit named Buksheesh Singh, who was later adopted by Sher Singh when Zebo became his concubine

20.	Gul Begum		Muslim	Dancing-girl from Amritsar	1830	1863?	Rs. 12,380	A jagir during the life of Ranjit Singh, in-addition to a *haveli*, mosque, and garden in Lahore	Adopted a Muslim boy
21.	Bhooree			Daughter of a Gujjar family from Mandi	1831	?	Rs. 10,096		Adopted Bhoop Singh, the son of a slave-girl
22.	Deokee Khoord			Former slave-girl from Jasrota	1832	?	Rs. 2,465	Residence in possibly Jammu, where she moved	
23.	Suman Kaur			Daughter of a Jatt zamindar from Ferozepore	1832	?	Rs. 1,440	Residence in possibly Ferozepore, where she later moved back to	
24.	Chainpurwala			Unknown	?				
25.	Hardavi		Hindu	Daughter of Bavee and Singhasno of Utulgarh, *zillah* Gurdaspur	?	1839 (death by sati)			
26.	Deokee Kulan			Unknown	?	1854	Unknown		
27.	Doulee Kulan			Former slave-girl of Rani Kishno (?)	?	1859	Rs. 3,015		
28.	Durooptee			From Nurpur	?	29 December 1852	Rs. 1,782		
29.	Gulab Kaur			From Sialkot	?	July 1856 (died at the age of 47)	Rs. 1,620		
30.	Unknown 30th wife								

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